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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000363

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TAGS: PREL PINR ER SU

SUBJECT: EU SPECIAL REP PEKKA HAAVISTO CALLS ON ERITREAN  
PRESIDENT ISAIAS

REF: ASMARA 346

Classified By: AMB. Scott H. DeLisi for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) In discussions on April 7 with EU Special Representative for Sudan Pekka Haavisto, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki clearly stated Eritrea would not attend the scheduled April 28 meeting on Darfur in Tripoli. Haavisto reported that President Isaias appeared definite - and perhaps slighted that Eritrea was not included in the initial invitations from Libya. Isaias did say, however, that he planned to meet with the Government of Sudan on April 21 and perhaps that meeting might result in a change of heart. According to Haavisto, Isaias seemed concerned about the Tripoli agenda, noting that discussions "could go in the wrong direction in Libya." Haavisto came away with the impression that there remains some competition between Eritrea and Libya over who is leading the initiative. Finally, in discussing the Tripoli meeting, President Isaias advised Haavisto that the Government of Sudan needs to be represented in Tripoli by the Sudanese Government of National Unity (GNU), including the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) - Minni Minawi and not just the National Congress Party (NCP).

¶2. (C) In the two and one half hour meeting, Isaias offered Haavisto a history of the relationship between Eritrea and Sudan, an opinion on sanctions, and asserted that Eritrea was willing to "work together" with the EU on Darfur. Isaias, sounding a note far different from what we have heard over the past year, characterized the Bashir government as "a terrorist regime" and said that Eritrea would prefer not to work with President Bashir. (Comment: This is a theme Eritrea voiced regularly when it was hosting the SPLM and before deciding over a year ago that the time had come to rebuild bridges to Bashir and the NCP. End Comment.) At this point, Isaias continued, there was "nothing Eritrea could do about that." On sanctions, Isaias said he felt they were "not enough to change anything." Haavisto commented in his post-meeting briefing with the western diplomatic community that Isaias seemed committed to Eritrea playing a key role in the negotiations. During the briefing French Ambassador Gerard Sambrana echoed this and noted that the French had met recently with the Eritreans in Abeche and in Paris and they too had the impression that the Eritreans were proceeding as

if they were leading the negotiations. (Comment: It is not clear to us, however, that the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) is prepared to engage constructively within the UN/AU process as opposed to having their own, Eritrea-led, mediation effort. End Comment.)

¶3. (C) In his briefing for the diplomatic community Haavisto also shared parts of his conversations during his trip to Sudan and Chad with the G-19, the National Redemption Front (NRF), Eritrea's People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) Head of Organizational Affairs and point person on Sudan, Abdella Jabir, and GOS Head of Intelligence Salah Abdallah Gosh. According to Haavisto, a majority of the SLM commanders are in favor of both returning to peace talks and with using the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), and not just the principles, as a basis for discussion. He also reported that tensions remain between the commanders who still support Abdulwahid and the G-19. Yet, some of the commanders expressed to Haavisto frustration at being dependent on the regional players such as Chad and Eritrea and at being caught in their machinations. Commenting on his meetings with Eritrea's Abdella Jabir, Haavisto indicated that he believes even Abdella recognizes that Eritrea can not get all of the non-signatories to come to Asmara. In addition, Haavisto assessed that members of the NRF have not come together with other non-signatories and that there are rebels, such as Ahmed Abdelshafei (SLM) and Khalil Ibrahim (NRF/JEM), and possibly Abdulwahid(SLM) that do not wish to return to Asmara. Haavisto reinforced to the NRF they even with their opposition to certain unnamed members of the proposed UN/AU negotiating team, the NRF cannot choose the UN/AU reps. In addition, in Haavisto's conversations with Salah Gosh, Gosh stated that the GNU is encouraging the SPLM and Salva Kiir to

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take a more active role in the peace efforts, but did relay to Haavisto that this will require the "opening up of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) as the NCP only has 52 percent and has nothing left to give."

¶4. (C) Comment: This trip was Haavisto's final one to Asmara as EU Special Envoy as he will be taking up his seat in the Finnish Parliament the beginning of May. The news that Eritrea is in a huff and refusing to go to Tripoli is not surprising. Eritrea's absence from the initial invitation list was most likely perceived by President Isaias as a snub by Libya which Isaias sees as much as a competitor as a partner in trying to resolve the issues in Sudan. Disinclined to take a back seat to the Libyans it may take some serious Sudanese persuasion to get him to change his mind. As for Isaias' expressed willingness to "work together" with the Europeans on Darfur, Post remains skeptical about Eritrea's "new image" (reftel), especially given the GSE's continued rejection of many of the international community's fundamental concerns about the humanitarian and security situation in Darfur. Nonetheless, we continue to accept that Eritrea could play a useful part in negotiations on Darfur. We believe, however, we must continue to remind our European and UN partners that we will need to make it clear to Eritrea that for its role to be meaningful and welcomed it will need to be played out in support of the UN/AU process. End Comment.

DeLisi